JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL

AMERICA'S TWO-FRONT WAR: THE AMERICAN MEDIA ASSAULT ON OUR

CENTER OF GRAVITY

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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Abstract

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Title: America's Two-Front War: The American Media Assault on our Center of Gravity

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The Vietnam War demonstrated how critical American public support is to sustaining successful military operations. Empowered by their experience and effect on the American public during the Vietnam War, America's media has maintained a "second-front" against the U.S. military by targeting its center of gravity, attempting to influence American public support against military operations. As a result, the military has been forced to fight a "two-front" war. In addition to its battlefield strategy, the military must fight to protect its center of gravity--America public support. The thesis of this paper is that the U.S. military must reduce the vulnerability of its center of gravity to U.S. media assaults by operating in a manner consistent with public expectations of the military and by ensuring the American public understands military goals and operations. In short, if the public understands the military's mission, how the military has accomplished that mission, and the behavior of its forces, public support should be strong enough to withstand the media's assault.

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"In war, truth is the first casualty."

Aeschylus (525-456 BC)

"It is much to be wished that our printers were more discrete in many of their publications. We see in almost every paper proclamations or accounts transmitted by the enemy of an injurious nature."

George Washington (1777)[1]

"The war was fought on many fronts. At that time, the most important front was the American public opinion."

Nguyen Giap, (Late 1960s)[2]

"I knew we had won the battle for public opinion when I watched a *Saturday Night Live* skit just before the ground offensive got under way where the press was the butt of satire."

Colin Powell (1991)[3]

Introduction

Carl Von Clausewitz, noted German soldier, writer, and strategist, described war "as a remarkable trinity" in his book On War. The three parts of his trinity were the government, the army [military], and the people, and each of the three elements needed

the others to function properly and to maintain the proper balance in society.[4] Had

Clausewitz been around today, he probably would have added a fourth element—the

media. From inception, the United States military's relationship with the media could be

described as a conflict, a rivalry, and an uneasy mistrust, but occasionally, as a

partnership. In the 20th century, the high point of that relationship was the partnership

between the military and the media during World War II (WWII). On the other hand, the

low point of the military-media relationship was the Vietnam War. Like no other

military conflict in U.S. history, the Vietnam War saw the media demonstrate its power

on American society and become a driving factor in shaping America's will to fight in

Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War also demonstrated how critical American public

support is to sustaining successful military operations. In the 30 years since the Vietnam

War, that ideal has evolved so much that American public support has become the

military's center of gravity; the source of power which enables the military to sustain

operations. This evolution was not lost on the media. Empowered by their experience

and effect on the American public during the Vietnam War, America's media has

maintained a "second-front" against the U.S. military by targeting its center of gravity,

attempting to influence American public support against military operations. As a result,

the military has been forced to fight a "two-front" war. In addition to its battlefield

strategy, the military must fight for America public support. The thesis of this paper is

that the U.S. military must reduce the vulnerability of its center of gravity to U.S. media

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by operating in a manner consistent with public expectations of the military. In short, if

the public understands the military's mission, how the military has accomplished that

mission, and the behavior of its forces, public support should be strong enough to withstand the media's assault.

This paper begins with an analysis of the relationship between the military and the media and its effects on the American public. It provides a deeper look at how and why the American public is targeted by both the military and the media. Following that analysis, the paper examines public support for major military conflicts from Vietnam to the Global War on Terrorism (GWoT). This examination is not designed to document military-media relations as much as it is to show how the military has protected or lost its center of gravity. Since the conflict between the military and the media is unlikely to change, this paper concludes by addressing the means by which the military can ensure its behavior is consistent with public expectations and how to better articulate its goals and operations to the American public in order to secure its center of gravity and maintain public support.

Section I. The Nature of the Conflict

The American public is the media's powerbase. When the media reports critically on the military, it plays to that powerbase as it influences public support. Coincidently, American public support is also the military's powerbase, and the military also attempts to leverage American public support. Therein lies the problem: two elements competing for the same powerbase. The primary complaint raised by the military against the media is that the media consistently paints a negative picture of the military. Typically, media reporting of the military is seen as a "glass half-empty" approach. At its worst, media reporting of the military reveals military vulnerabilities that could be used by our

enemies. The media, however, sees it as their right to publish information on military faults and weaknesses even though the military feels those types of issues should fall behind the operational security (OPSEC) curtain as it could aid the enemy and place U.S. forces and plans at risk. The difference in thinking is just one of the basic differences between the military and the media.

The conflict between the media and the military has always existed, but at times, it has been managed effectively for the greater good. The cooperative relationship between the military and the media that was so present during WWII broke down in the 1960s and has yet to be repaired, despite the recent changes in the relationship brought on by the return of embedded reporters with U.S. military forces. As both the military and the media continue to develop new ways to get their messages directly and indirectly to the American public, they will need to overcome inherent institutional behaviors. On the one hand, the military is part of the government bureaucracy, and like most large organizations, the military prefers to do much of their business behind closed doors. This is especially true with many aspects of warfighting because the nature of war is both shocking and sensitive to the American public.[5] Alternatively, the media sees itself as society's watchdog, out to expose governmental waist, fraud, and mistakes. So, it feels free to place the military under public scrutiny, especially if the media senses the presence of a cover-up.

Even though press reporting may be critical, the media still serves as the primary window to military operations for most Americans. Likewise, the media needs the military to ensure it gets the story correct since it does not always understand military realities and cannot afford to lose public credibility as it presents a story. But the media

is concerned with more than American public support. The media is part of a business, and must constantly balance the demands of the market place with its journalistic efforts. More times than not, this equates to a balance between sensationalism, compromise, and journalistic ethics.[6]

Some would argue that the differences between the military and the media are too disparate to be overcome. In its simplest terms, the press wants freedom whereas the military wants control. But the real problem is far more complex. The media as a whole is characterized as being competitive, individualistic, impatient, and with a disregard for rules. The media is also seen as more liberal than military personnel, especially senior military leadership. In the mid-1970s, 240 journalists were interviewed and asked how they voted in the four presidential elections from 1964-1976. 86% of the reporters acknowledged that they had voted for the more liberal democratic candidates.[7] In years past, political differences between the media and the military were often overlooked. There is no better evidence of this atmosphere than in WWII, when reporters like Walter Cronkite were actually trained as B-17 gunners. Despite Cronkite's civilian status, he flew on bombing missions over France, firing "at every German fighter that came into our neighborhood."[8]

The military, on the other hand, is usually characterized by teamwork, discipline, and a tight control over forces, operations, and rules of engagement (ROE). Senior military leaders are far more likely to have social values closer to those of middle America than to the more permissive values of the media as a whole.[9] Military personnel are most typically honored for bravery, sacrifice, and selfless action, whereas media personnel, despite their willingness to accompany U.S. forces into combat, win

acclamation for their stories in the form of Pulitzer prices or other awards, often with monetary rewards. Understandably, there is no journalistic counterpart to the military ideals of duty, honor, and country or to the military leadership ultimately responsible for life and death of military forces.[10]

The First Amendment and Operational Security

The First Amendment states "Congress shall make no law…abridging the freedom of speech; or of the press."[11] The media derives an amazing amount of power from such a simple statement. Military personnel take an oath to defend the Constitution, and in effect, to protect the rights of the media. The Bill of Rights gives the media the right to report what it sees, but it does not force the military to show the media all that it desires (as long as the military abides by the Freedom of Information Act provisions). Likewise, it gives the media the right to ask questions of the military, but does not mandate that the military respond to those questions. Both entities have a place in a democracy, and society works best with an informed and educated public. Regarding military operations, the public must understand the conduct of war, and the media is best equipped to explain to and educate the public.[12]

Military personnel support the concept of the public's right to know. However, the argument derives from exactly what the public has a right to know. Some media critics have argued that the media has over played the "right to know" card as a shield to hide irresponsibility of the effects of its stories. To the military, that invariably means the potential to breach OPSEC. Following closely on the heels of the "right to know" argument, is the distinction between what the media knows (or thinks they know) and what they should publish. Even some media personnel acknowledge that there is a huge

gap between the right to publish and the requirement to publish; a decision most military people choose not to leave to the media.[13] In questioning a reporter's motives, one military officer "found it amazing that our media would want to tell our enemy that our guns and bullets aren't working. I hear no patriotism." Certainly those sentiments are valid, especially if the information is acted upon in a way that threatens or takes U.S. lives. On the contrary, the journalistic response clearly explains the validity of a free press in a democratic society: "We do our job because we are patriotic. Your [the military's] job is to protect peoples' lives. Our job is to give people information so they can evaluate how well you are doing your job."[14] Journalists ask tough questions to hold governments accountable for their actions. To many troops, the media often confuses the policy-makers with the policy executers. Since the policy-makers are not on the battlefield, the military often takes the brunt of the search for accountability.[15] There are those reporters that indirectly take aim at U.S. interests because they pretend to be "citizens of the world" with no sense of patriotism or higher national loyalties who refuse to accept their responsibilities as citizens. However, the American public will eventually question any member of the media that constantly places the media's right to know over basic humanity, U.S. interests, and military security, and when the public does so, it exercises its greatest weapon – strength of will.[16]

Gen (Ret) Norm Schwarzkopf, in describing the inherent conflicts between the military and the media, remarked that he thought reporters' priorities were speed first, accuracy second, and OPSEC third, whereas his priorities as Commander for Operation DESERT STORM (DS) were exactly the opposite.[17] Many military personnel accuse the media of misunderstanding the importance of OPSEC. To military personnel, the safety

of its forces is paramount, and reporting of operational details that could place their safety in jeopardy should always be minimized. Additionally, proper OPSEC also prevents military strategies from being disclosed. Often, the press has accused the military of being overly conservative with its OPSEC campaign, placing all information involving combat operations off limits. Clearly, there is middle ground in this argument, but that takes a mutual understanding by both the media and the military. Additionally, it is incumbent on the military to be honest with the information it releases to the media. The military is not required to release all it knows, nor is it required to correct erroneous conclusions that the media draws. For example, some members of the media reported that the U.S. was practicing for a naval landing off the east coast of Kuwait during DS. The military certainly did not mind these media reports and saw no need to correct them. Saddam Hussein got much of his intelligence from the media and eventually would be forced to divert troops to the Kuwaiti coastline, reducing his forces along the actual invasion routes.[18]

There are clearly valid arguments for OPSEC at the tactical level, but is it still a valid argument at the strategic level? At the strategic level, military surprise is almost a thing of the past. For full-up combat operations, it is obsolete. In today's world of partisan domestic and international politics and media technology, U.S. military actions are almost invariably preceded by warnings, deadlines, United Nations (UN) mandates, and flexible deterrent options. Operations DS, ALLIED FORCE (OAF), ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), and IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) all began after political negotiations and demands failed to produce results acceptable to the UN, NATO, and U.S.-led coalitions.[19] In most cases, it could be said that U.S. presidents are forced to make their

case for action on the global stage long before military operations in order to exhaust all diplomatic efforts, build coalitions, and most importantly, to gain American public support for military operations.

Typically, the media's primary complaint against OPSEC is censorship. However, if the decision is made to allow the media unrestricted access to the battlefield, the days of total censorship are over. Technology has simply advanced to a point where it is impossible to stop all reporting. Temporary censorship, on the other hand, is still very much in practice because the military believes it saves lives. While the media may argue against censorship, and the military complains about the media's desire to print operational details, there have been very few serious security breeches by the press. On the other hand, propaganda value breeches by the press are far more common.[20]

Public Opinion

Public expectations have changed since Vietnam. Gone are the days when the nightly news from the three major TV networks or the daily newspapers provided Americans with the majority of their news. The Cable News Network (CNN) has been credited with starting the cable news trend in 1980, and for a variety of reasons, America now craves a "competitive, fast-food style, 24-hour media" that provides instantaneous updates.[21] Some would say that the lack of time appropriated to substantively understanding the issues makes the viewing public as individuals, ignorant of the issues. However, as a whole, public opinion is an incredible force.[22]

An understanding of warfare and how often the U.S. military engages in conflicts could be difficult for many of today's generation. Take for example, teenagers or Americans in their early 20s. When was the last time they knew of a U.S. military not

involved in Iraq or the Balkans? For almost 15 years, U.S. military operations in both regions have been covered in all media forums. Over that 15-year span, could the American public have grown to perceive constant combat deployments as the "new norm" for the military? Certainly, the press recognizes such perceptions by the American public. Remembering that the media is a business, designed to gain and maintain viewers, military operations often fade to the back pages, appear only on the ticker-tape bulletins that scroll across the bottom of newscasts, or disappear completely from the headlines. In some cases, only when activity deviates from the norm will the press reengage its reporting. In many cases, crisis events with U.S. casualties generate this renewed coverage: 18 deaths and U.S. bodies dragged through city streets; a crash of U.S. aircraft; U.S. ships damaged by terrorist attacks; or suicide bombings. To many military personnel, the old adage that, "if it bleeds, it leads", is unfortunately all too true. During the 1990s, the mere presence of reporters often forebode a sense of death with some military personnel. With nicknames like, "the blood lady", some journalists only seemed to cover U.S. military actions when there were U.S. casualties.[23]

As the military often walks the fine line between OPSEC and providing Congress, the media, the international community, and the American public with descriptions of its operations, it can trip into several pitfalls. Positive news from the first Gulf War definitely outweighed the negative from that conflict, but some reporters feel the military "sanitized" the conflict because of its lack of pictures and stories on casualties – both friendly and enemy; so much so that the largest U.S. military operation since Vietnam presented the U.S. public with a false sense of what war is really like. Some military personnel often site DS as building a false sense of optimism with the U.S. public that

became a new norm for military operations. Military operations in the 15 years since the first Persian Gulf War are now measured against that conflict in terms of quick victory and low casualties. And by new public "standards", defeating a country's military in six months and taking control of a nation for three to four years with less than 3,000 total battlefield deaths is not looked on favorably by the media or a large part of the American public. Similarly, the military and the media have measured public support for today's military operations by the same DS-type support. If that is the new yardstick, the military's center of gravity may never measure up unless the security of the nation itself is threatened.

Some might argue that this concept of a false sense of optimism says more about the American public as a whole than it does about efficient and effective military operations. In an era where a single aircraft crash and the tragic deaths of 20 military personnel generate congressional scrutiny and nation-wide demand for answers, how would the American public be able to sustain the news from WWII, where single incidents (sunken ships for example) and single battles generated over 1,000 U.S. deaths in a single day? Multiple factors account for the change in public perception of the military today. The efficiency of today's U.S. force, as seen in DS, is one reason. A second one is the state of global politics and security where there is a single superpower and no "world wars" have been fought in the past 60 years.   In this author's opinion, American society has become somewhat intellectually weaker, more fickle, and most interested in the instant gratification of the quick and easy win than it has in a long-term security environment more focused on substance than appearance.

Poll Results and Editorial Bias

The U.S. public's relationship with the media is not a simple one and is usually inconsistent as evidenced by recent Pew Research Center opinion polls. In a June 2005 poll, a growing number of people questioned the American media's fairness and patriotism. Yet, these same people continue to say that on the whole, they like mainstream American news outlets (the exceptions were nationally influential newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times whose favorable ratings continue to decline.)[24] Several other related results from the Pew Research Center polls illustrate the public's conflicting relationship with the press. Overall, the percentage of people who say they believe what they read in their daily papers has decreased by 30%, from 84% in 1985 to 54% in 2005. In questioning media motives, every demographic and political group reported that "when deciding what stories to report, the media care more about attracting the biggest audience rather than about keeping the public informed." Additionally, the percentage of respondents who thought that the media stands up for America has shrunk by 27% from 2001 to 2005, while the percentage of respondents who said the media was too critical of the military increased by 23% during that same time frame. Finally, the percentage saying press criticism weakens the nation's defenses now stands at its highest point since 1985. [25]

Polling in November 2005 also illustrated how distant the media is on war-related issues from both the general public and the military itself. In response to whether the decision to take military action against Iraq was the right or wrong decision, the general public was roughly split on whether the war was the correct decision, but 71% of the news media felt it was the wrong decision. Similarly, 44% of the general public felt that

Iraq's impact was *helpful* on the war on terrorism where as 68% of the media felt that Iraq was *hurting* the war on terrorism. [26] Clearly, the media sees things differently that the general public when it comes to military and defense issues. Could the press be that much more educated or that much more in tune with world events that it had better insight into the military and international situation related to Iraq? Or, could it be, as many media critics would argue, nothing more than media bias based on political motives?

One of the best perspectives on the differences between the military and the media is found in a study conducted at Vanderbilt University in 1994 and 1995. [27] The survey goal was to assess how military officers and journalists, responsible for covering military affairs, perceive each other while measuring their views on war, defense, and military issues. On the whole, the survey results did nothing more than demonstrate the gap in the relationship between the media and the military, but there can be no doubt that that both groups will have to change if they expect to operate in an environment based on trust and respect. Otherwise, the American public will continue to receive incomplete and inconsistent reporting on military operations.[28] When that is the case, the military's center of gravity become vulnerable to assault. In a worst case scenario, weak public support could actually empower the enemy.

Propaganda: A Weapon for the Enemy

Over the years, the media have provided plenty of ammunition to the military that justifies a skeptical attitude towards media intentions. One of the most notorious. episodes in the military-media relationship emerged from the 1988 Columbia University Seminars on Media and Society. In one segment called, *Under Orders, Under Fire*,

veteran correspondent Mike Wallace of CBS news was one of several newsmen asked whether they would warn American soldiers if they knew the soldiers were about to be ambushed or whether they would simply let the ambush occur and report on the results. Directly contradicting another reporter's response, Wallace said, "Others would regard it as simply another story that they are there to cover." In justifying his rationale of not notifying the U.S. troops, Wallace indicated that his duty as a reporter outweighed his duty as an American citizen.[29] To some, his comments are reflective of media bias against the military and a lack of patriotism that puts the security of military forces at a lower priority than the media story itself.

When editorial bias is present, the media loses its objectivity. At that point, it is not presenting news any more. It is presenting propaganda, often providing our enemies with a window to address the American public.[30] Enemy leadership in Vietnam, Iraq, and Al Qaeda are keenly aware of the impact U.S. media plays on American public support for military operations, and many leaders see the media as a weapon to target America's will. The harshest media critics declare that unbalanced reporting, negative stories on the military, or coverage of enemy leaders and their actions are information operations weapons that provide "comfort and aid to the enemy."[31] U.S. governmental and military leaders have long been frustrated with the media during times of conflict, but the Vietnam War may have been the first conflict where American journalists were considered a strategic threat equal to enemy forces. Secretary of State Dean Rusk became so frustrated by the media that he asked several journalists in early 1968, "There gets to be a point when the question is, Whose side are you on?"[32]

In the 1960s, one of the ways that the North Vietnamese affected American public opinion was through well-documented direct contact with U.S. and international journalists. Even before TV journalism became the primary media for many Americans, an incident such as Harrison Salisbury, Assistant Managing Editor of the New York Times, visiting Hanoi in December 1966 sparked feelings of mistrust about his impartiality. Harrison's first report was filed less than 24 hours after his arrival in the North Vietnam capitol, and in some critics' views, amounted to nothing more than a "North Vietnamese press release."[33]

Saddam Hussein attempted the same technique after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, primarily through U.S. media outlets. CNN provided considerable air time and coverage to Saddam, which he wisely tried to use for his own public relations campaign to cast doubt at the U.S.-led coalition and to strengthen his own support from the Arab world.[34] In 1990, Saddam told U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie that the U.S. would not tolerate 10,000 U.S. deaths in a ground war.[35] On 28 Jan 1991, he also told CNN's Peter Arnette, "…all of the people of Iraq are grateful to all the noble souls amongst the U.S. people who are coming out into the streets and demonstrating against the war." Saddam seemed to appreciate what the media were doing on his behalf and permitted CNN to stay in Baghdad and broadcast his "propaganda" to the American public. Some analysts describe CNN's activity as nothing short of aiding the enemy and go so far as to compare this media activity to Tokyo Rose in Japan or Lord Haw Haw in Germany in WWII.[36]

Politics

Many media critics argue that the military is the prime target of media criticism

because it is the most visible element of the government's administration and foreign policy. This certainly appears to be the case with President George W. Bush who is widely unpopular with the mainstream press. If such sentiments are true, then it seems only natural that the press will engage in "gotcha" journalism, always on the lookout to highlight perceived military failures or setbacks. To those members of the media involved in agenda-laced reporting, military veteran and journalist David Hackworth offered an alternative target: "…blame the politicians and other jerks who sent our kids there [Vietnam] instead of demeaning the brave men who fought…."[37] Many of the actions perceived by the military as hostile towards its cause are indirect off-shoots of media scrutiny of U.S. policies and politics. A veteran New York Times military correspondent admitted as much when he said, "it is impossible to separate coverage of military affairs from politics."[38]

The media recognizes that the American public usually holds military personnel in high esteem. Unless it has absolute proof of criminal or unethical behavior (such as the photos of American soldiers abusing prisoners at Abu Gharib), the media usually will not gain viewers by attacking military personnel. Policy-makers, to include administration officials, DOD civilians, and senior military officers, are a completely different story and are fair game for media attacks. If the decision-makers are unpopular with the media, mainstream media may fulfill its agenda by criticizing military operations as a policy failure rather than evaluating military actions for their tactical success. Even when coverage is objective, the story still gets a label. The media has a right and an obligation to question, but the country is so fragmented politically that everything looks political.[39] In most cases, media coverage of U.S. forces in combat is tied to other

aspects of American society, such as national elections, government scandals, and other aspects of domestic politics. All these issues affect public support, and if left unchecked, the public could become disenchanted as the military sees its center of gravity become more vulnerable.

Casualties

Few stories of military operations tug at American popular support like U.S. casualties, and the media knows this best. Media veterans that want to recapture the "glory days" of Vietnam will find a way to do so in every conflict. In Iraq and Afghanistan today, reports of hard-fought battles, that are clear tactical victories for the U.S.-led coalition, are often portrayed solely in terms of the number of U.S. battlefield deaths. The combination of casualties with anything less than spectacular success has become open for criticism in today's media environment. Often, the media will link casualties with normal mission difficulties to generate criticism at home, resulting in the potential of lost public support.[40] In one reporter's mind, this type of bias reporting has the potential to turn victory into defeat and "can affect support at home if kept up long enough." In an extreme perspective, ultimately, it is conceivable that many could look at the media as a type of 5th column in the GWoT, attempting to undermine a nation's solidarity and U.S. military efforts to maintain stability in that country.[41]

ABC Nightline anchor Ted Koppell was one member of the media who believed the casualty coverage in Iraq would be far less controversial if the Bush administration and the DOD would have provided a better explanation to the American public on why the U.S. military has to remain in Iraq. This might have been especially true during the media's self-made significance of the two-thousandth U.S. death in Iraq; a completely

artificial milestone that was over played by many mainstream media outlets as if the 2,000th was more important than the 1st, 100th, or 1,000th. There is nothing conclusive that indicates the media scrutiny over U.S. deaths in Iraq alone has turned the U.S. public away from supporting U.S. military efforts, but if the administration had done a better job articulating the criticality and progress of the mission in Iraq, there might not be a doubt that the American public would support the military whether there was a sacrifice of 200 or 2,000 lives.[42]

   Military analyst John Pike has studied the military's casualty reporting system and believes the military's objective of a low casualty count is driven primarily by the fear of losing public support as occurred during the Vietnam War. According to Pike, "Minimizing the apparent cost of the war…is one way that they're hoping to sustain public support here at home." It can be argued, though, that America understands the costs of war. After all, most wartime polls indicate that American public support is not weakened simply by high casualty reports. Ultimately, the casualty figure is an issue the military cannot get away from because it involves the most serious consequence of combat operations. At least for some military critics, the military would do better not to "spin" the casualty count and place their confidence in the American public and their willingness to support military action despite high casualties.[43] Failure to do so invariably invites two consequences. First, if the numbers do not match, the situation will invite media scrutiny. Secondly, once the media is involved, there is the real possibility that the media could report the story in a way that could eat away at American public support for U.S. military action.

The media coverage of U.S. casualties is important, but it should be reported in the context of how they occur (combat, training accidents, or natural causes). All too often though, casualties, and in particular, combat deaths, are reported simply as statistics used to demonize military intentions and operations. Meanwhile, far less scrutiny is given towards the deaths of American civilians, whether they are from accidents, disease, or crime. For instance, U.S. Murder rates from 1998 to 2004 show an average of 15,000-17,000 U.S. citizens murdered *each* year! The murder figures for a single year are six times more than the total U.S. battlefield deaths since 2001, yet the media does not make an issue over that loss of life by indicting society or the federal, state, and local police forces. Instead, it focuses on combat losses, which pail in comparison to criminal deaths in the U.S. every year.[44] So with such a clear psychological attack on the U.S. center of gravity, why does U.S. military activity still maintain public support? Time and time again, American soldiers seem willing to "step up to the plate" and maybe more importantly, the American public is willing to tolerate loss of life. Soldiers serve the nation voluntarily and take orders from their civilian bosses. It is not that simple though for the American public. However, military casualties stand a far greater chance of being tolerated if the conflict has worthy, achievable goals that are clearly articulated by the administration and dealt with honestly by both military and civilian leaders.[45]

Technology

No single factor can account for the relationship between the military, the media, and the American public. Politics, history, and cultural have all shaped the relationship throughout American history. Since the 1960s however, technology has been the driving factor in the military's relationship with the media and the mechanism that affected the

American public in a new way. As introduced in the Vietnam War, technology, specifically, TV broadcasts, can bring combat directly to American living rooms. TV broadcasts lead to immediate public awareness and support for military operations at the same time that it leads to scrutiny over military strategy and operations.[46] Obviously, the military welcomes the awareness and opportunity to gain American support for its operations, yet it is apprehensive about the scrutiny that comes with today's instantaneous access.

Whereas the written word seems more aimed at the public intellect, graphic imagery is aimed at public emotions in today's society. Facts, results, and victory declarations, if not publicized correctly, are no match for pictures of military personnel in mosques or pictures of abused Iraqi prisoners. Often, graphic images serve to strengthen American resolve, however, the graphic nature of war can also shock the American public. Imagine the public's response if they could have seen the initial landings and action on the beaches at Normandy on Jun 6, 1944. Arguably, some leaders would have demanded that we abandon the invasion because of the casualties and initial inertia of the attack. However, it can be argued that while graphic images displayed on TV do have the ability to shock, American will is strong enough to overcome those emotions if it has been realistically prepared for the outcome. Addressing the so-called CNN-effect of TV images, one former diplomatic correspondent stated that, "If the government has a strong vision, then TV is not likely to have a major effect. If the government has an ambivalent position…these pictures can have a big effect."[47] President Nixon reflected in his memoirs on the ability of TV to demoralize the American public because it showed the

graphic nature of war. More importantly, President Nixon was extremely concerned with how the U.S. could fight a war abroad without unity and strength of purpose at home.[48]

Former SECDEF Melvin Laird points out that technology has become a facilitator for America's military enemies, presenting them with a direct shot at American public support. According to Laird, Iraqi insurgents discovered the weakness of the American public's will and are trying to exploit it. Their main weapons are IED [and suicide bombers]. However, the technology that facilitates the enemy's cause is not bombs or explosive devices, but the media video that replays the explosions over and over through satellite news broadcasts.[49] Even for well-read and current TV news audiences, casualty figures can be confusing when they are broadcast as soon as the attacks are reported by the military, throughout that day, and into the next. Thus, two, or five, or 10 military deaths are reported, replayed, and analyzed and appear to grow as the reporting increases. Ultimately, these casualties become the psychological equivalent of far greater numbers than are actually involved. In Lairds words, "The danger to one U.S. soldier captured on tape becomes a threat to everyone's son, father, daughter, or mother."[50]

Media Training for Military Coverage

Technology and globalization, combined with success and increased viewers, have had a profound impact on media operations. Networks like CNN now find themselves available for near-instant coverage anywhere a crisis breaks out. However, that instant access also presents some challenges. First and foremost is the competition among the major media outlets (CNN, Fox News, BBC, and others) for a greater audience. Many media analysts complain that the pressure to always be first has compromised journalistic values. So much so that speed has become more important

than fact-checking and proper sourcing. Because profit margin is always a factor in the media business, some networks have reduced their direct sources and use more second-hand and less reliable sources that do not always meet journalistic and ethical standards. The most stinging criticism may be that in the absence of real news, some networks actually make the news, especially with their use of commentators.[51] In terms of military coverage, the press has relied more heavily on expert commentators who are free to speculate and second-guess administration, DOD, and senior military leaders. This is especially dangerous in the GWoT where traditional linear battlefields do not exist, and success is directly related to covert actions, increased ISR operations, and other restricted access activities. In such an environment, the networks could be accused of irresponsible journalism when their commentaries confuse fact with speculation.[52] If the government and DOD do not offer a satisfying account of events, the American people are left with the incomplete and confusing media presentation, which has the potential of cutting public support.

Television news may have strayed the farthest from actually reporting the news. Presumably in an effort to increase viewership, commentary about an event has become as popular if not more popular than actually reporting the facts of that event. Often, it is hard to know when the story stops and the commentary begins. Columnist Kathleen Parker explains, "media doesn't cover the news. They hunt it down, beat it to death, resuscitate it, and beat it to death again. TV news programs aren't information outlets so much as guess-the-news game shows where "experts" analyze the unknown, and pundits predict the unknowable." This can be dangerous to the American people though. In the

absence of clear facts, expert speculation can distort both perception and, eventually, reality.[53]

Some reporters, who believe they got the U.S. out of Vietnam, have become self-enamored with their own power and want to keep it.[54] It may be this attitude which alleviated the need to train more journalists specializing in military reporting. Certainly, over the past decade, the U.S. military ops-tempo has generated an increase in military coverage opportunities for the media. For many reporters though, they must attend a "military boot camp" type of training designed to teach them the basics of the military units they will cover. Military Boot Camp began as early as November 2002 for OIF. Even those that did not attend were with their embedded units by February 2003, so they could receive local unit briefs, refresher training, and participate in the deployment and staging operations.[55] OIF Boot Camp attracted almost 60 reporters, many of whom were surprised by the 0500 start times for training and activities designed to familiarize the media with military operations and better indoctrinate them for embedded operations.[56]

Many of today's reporters have no experience with the military or reporting from a war zone. For many reporters covering the current war in Iraq, this is their first war assignment. As author Chris Hedge puts it, "They are simultaneously nervous and excited…People like this are very pliable, which is why the military likes them. Most of them are hotel room warriors, and that's why there's a great deal of enmity between those of us who spend all of our time in the field and the majority of the press that doesn't".[57]

It does beg the question though, about why media companies would allow journalists who are generally ignorant and inexperienced in military language, organization, methods, and technology to cover military operations.[58] When reporters are

thrown into areas where they do not have expertise or experience and are expected to generate stories, it amounts to "parachute" journalism, and it could lead to less than positive press coverage of military operations.[59]

Missed Opportunities

Is the military at fault for its issues with the media, continuously missing the opportunities to help the media tell the military's story in a better light? To some, the media is a good force multiplier for military public affairs (PA) efforts. Certainly, there are issues that simply cannot be discussed and reported in real-time because of security reasons. In most cases though, the media offers the military an outlet to explain its story as it did successfully with embedded reporters in OIF. The end result could be an opportunity to shape military activities in a positive light, to increase public support, and strengthen the center of gravity against future assault. In extreme cases, increased public support could drive congress to act in support of military operations (increased funding, new weapons systems, better body armor, etc.). [60]

Failure to completely disclose all information surrounding specific military operations or incidents has been a long-standing media critique. In the absence of a formal military response or statement, the press will often fill in the blanks with alternative and unreliable sources. Ultimately, the American public will form an opinion based off media speculation and "detective-like" reporting instead of the actual events and issues reported by the military. As former New York Times journalist Richard Halloran states: "If military officers refuse to respond to the press, they are in effect abandoning the field to critics of the Armed Forces. That would serve neither the nation nor the military services."[61] Of the four military services, the Marines are the best

known for their PA policy whereby all marines are spokesmen for the Corps. Obviously, no troops in any military will always speak positively about moral and discipline or their current surroundings, however, the Marine Corps culture from day one stresses the pride of being a Marine.[62] And in general, that pride has paid off in terms of successful publicity and a positive perception by the American public.

Passing on negative information, admitting mistakes, or revealing improper behavior is never a pleasant experience. And when military operations do not go well, consequences usually deserve some scrutiny, and almost always generate a media spotlight. In cases such as Mai Lai or Abu Ghraib, the scrutiny is warranted and only increases the demand for a military explanation. In many instances though, the military seems unwilling to publicize activities or circumstances that generate negative exposure instead of "fessing up" and moving on. Two such cases come to mind. The first involves the U.S. Air Force and Lt Kelly Flinn, one of the Air Force's first female bomber pilots who was given a general discharge in 1997. In the case of Lt Flinn, much of the public did not understand the true crux of the matter: Lt Flinn's failure to follow lawful orders and lying to investigators. However, her insubordinate behavior took a back seat to the more widely publicized adultery charge with the American public. In hindsight, the Air Force would probably have been better served if it had stated right from the beginning that Lt Flinn's insubordination and lying under oath were far more critical issues than the adultery charges. The American public certainly had the capacity to understand the issues of her trustworthiness and judgment as it related to her duties as an aircrew member entrusted with nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the media and public alike would not have been forced to fill in the blanks themselves with incomplete and inaccurate

stories. There was no attempt to cover-up the facts, but the waters were muddied because the DOD failed to completely articulate the seriousness of the situation. What ensued was a well-publicized case in which most polls showed the American public split over the Air Force's decision to punish Flinn.[63] Despite statements from then Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Wagnall that the fraternization and adultery charges were far less serious than the allegations of lack of integrity and disobedience, most media outlets still focused on adultery.[64]

The second case involves the death of Pat Tillman in 2004. It is ironic that Pat Tillman's death had the opposite effect of the positive media attention given to his enlistment. The story of the nation's most famous volunteer and his enlistment in the Army after September 11, 2001, instead of continuing a successful and profitable NFL career, was well publicized. However, the details of his death were released in piecemeal fashion and, initially, erroneously. A week after his death, the Army released a statement awarding Tillman a posthumous Silver Star for combat valor. No mention of fratricide or the ongoing investigation were disclosed. Even when the initial reports of fratricide were disclosed a month later, Tillman's family said they understood that accidents happen. Yet, as time went by, more and more details began to appear that gave the perception that the Army was trying to cover up the true facts of the incident. Eventually, The Washington Post put together one of the most comprehensive articles on his death in Dec 2004 (seven months after his death) entitled: "Army Spun Tale Around Ill-Fated Mission."[65] Rightly or wrongly, this theme seemed to be the predominant perception of the Army's handling of the circumstances surrounding Tillman's death. Had the Army simply stated the truth from the outset, the media would not have had anything to

"uncover" and the odds are that the American public would have accepted the story for what it was; a patriotic American soldier who lost his life in the fog of war. The two situations are different and generated different media coverage (one based on lack of information and one based on incorrect information), but a case can be made that if more accurate and open reporting had been allowed at the outset of the stories, the military would have looked far better in the eyes of the U.S. public. As it stood, the credibility of the military was called into question, and in both cases, the wounds were "self-inflicted".

In our democratic society, the U.S. government and its military cannot be and are not the primary sources of information and news. As a result, the military will always need the media to educate the American public and inform them on U.S. military operations. If the military expects to build and maintain public support for military operations, it must understand the current media relationship with the military and how that relationship has evolved since the Vietnam War. The military must also accept the burden of scrutiny by the media and judgment by the American people; a process made even more difficult because of politics, inherent biases, missed opportunities, and the evolution of technology. The first section of this paper described some of the ways that both the media and the military build and tear down public support for military operations. Section II will examine several military conflicts, beginning with Vietnam, to see how well the military was able to protect its center of gravity from media assaults.

Section II.   Vietnam to the Global War on Terrorism

Vietnam

"There is a tendency in the military to blame our problems with lack of [American]

public support on the media. That is too easy an answer. The majority of the on-the-scene [Vietnam] reporting was factual--that is, reporters honestly reported what they had seen firsthand. Much of what they saw was horrible, for that is the nature of war. It was this horror, not the reporting, that so influenced the American people."

Col (Ret) Harry Summers[66]

Throughout America's decade-long conflict in Vietnam, politics, civil unrest, media coverage, battlefield successes, and military casualties all became intertwined to shape American public opinion. While it is true that the 1968 Tet Offensive was the spark that produced critical media coverage of the Vietnam War, the military and the White House administration share much of the blame for losing the public's support after Tet because of false or empty reporting on the status of the war. In the fall of 1967, President Lyndon Johnson and Gen William C. Westmoreland attempted to convince the U.S. public that the war was going well. In President Johnson's words, "We have reached an important point where the end begins to come into view." President Johnson also reported to the American public, after a trip to Vietnam, that "victory" was being "won" throughout South Vietnam. However in private, Johnson confided in General Westmoreland that he feared the war was unwinnable.[67] The theme of the Johnson administration, DOD personnel, and senior military leaders seemed to be: "The war had been marketed at home, after all, as a victory waiting to happen."[68]

Despite Johnson's personal thoughts, the nation more or less approved of how he was handling his job and the war in Vietnam. Gallup polls from Jan 1968 (pre-Tet) show 49% of Americans approved of President Johnson's performance while 39%

disapproved; these were very successful ratings considering that the war had been ongoing for five years and had produced 19,000 U.S. deaths.[69] After Tet though, things changed. Gallop polls during the first week of Feb showed 41% approving of President Johnson and 41% disapproving of the president's job performance—a 9% drop in approximately one month. By late February 1968, the polls showed the President's approval ratings at only 35% while his disapproval ratings had soared to 50%.[70] Many Americans see the 1968 Tet Offensive as the defining moment of the Vietnam War, when Americans finally understood that events were not going as well as the Johnson administration and senior military leaders proclaimed.[71] Certainly, the polls would indicate that Tet saw the military lose its center of gravity as its public support dwindled.

Veteran CBS newsman Walter Cronkite was at the heart of the matter of the military's relationship with the media and its influence on U.S. public support. Like most Americans who were listening to the administration and military leadership make assertions that "the end of the Vietnam War is in sight," Cronkite was surprised by the scope of Tet.[72] Before Tet was over, Cronkite went to Vietnam to observe the situation for himself, spending time in Saigon and Hue, among other locations and meeting with the troops (to include a very candid Gen Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., then General Westmoreland's deputy commander). Cronkite came away thinking that the war could no longer be justified.[73] Regardless of his previous perspective, Cronkite decided to editorialize his CBS special report on Tet. During the broadcast, entitled, *Who, What, When, Where, Why*, which aired at 10:00 PM on Feb 27, 1968, Cronkite displayed his true sentiments on the current state of the war in Vietnam: "We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington,

to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds…To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of this evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say we are mired in a stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory conclusion…It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out, then, will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could."[74] By today's media standards, Cronkite's words may seem fairly tame, but for 1968, they cast an incredible shadow over the military effort in Vietnam.

To CBS's surprise, the network did not experience the expected public outcry over Cronkite's comments, nor did President Lyndon Johnson, known to call Cronkite and others and complain of news coverage he objected to, respond immediately. President Johnson had obviously seen the report, and while his initial response may have been muted, his ultimate response was completely unexpected. After watching the CBS report on Tet, Johnson turned off the TV and said to his staffers and assistants "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." Five weeks later, President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection that fall.[75] If ever the media exhibited its ability to shape public opinion with its military coverage, this was it. Regardless of whether Cronkite swayed public opinion on the war solely with his report, President Johnson perceived that American public support was no longer behind the war effort. It is impossible to know the effect Tet and the change in public support would have had if President Johnson had run for reelection. It is clear however, that President Johnson saw public support eroding and felt that the military center of gravity was losing its strength.

History has recorded that the 1968 Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese supporters which took several years from which to recover. However, the attack was a major propaganda victory against the Johnson administration and a major defeat for U.S. military credibility. The public had been subject to the "propaganda" of success and ensuing victory for so long that it was unaware of the real battlefield conditions. Had the American public been educated on the true nature of the war, the conditions faced by U.S. soldiers, and the increasing threat from the enemy, it could be argued that the center of gravity would have been strong enough to withstand the shock and surprise of the 1968 Tet Offensive, and the media could not have exploited that shock in the manner that led to the event becoming a turning point for support to military operations in Vietnam.

As the Vietnam War continued into 1969 under the Nixon administration, many people were calling for an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. At the height of anti-war protests, President Nixon scheduled a live TV speech on Nov 3, 1969, that amounted to his strategy for the future of U.S. operations in Vietnam. In what became known as the "silent majority speech," President Nixon correctly identified the center of gravity for U.S. military operations in Vietnam and addressed the American will when he said, "And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support. Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that."[76] President Nixon would later state that the goal of that speech was to "make the case for continued American sacrifices in Vietnam directly to the people who were being asked to make those sacrifices."[77] The resulting Gallup Poll

showed an eleven point increase in President Nixon's approval ratings. No one will ever know why Nixon's approval ratings increased after the speech, but there can be no doubt that he appealed to the very strength of American society that was required for continued military operations in Vietnam—American will.

In summing up the relationship between the media and the military in Vietnam, author Peter Braestrup noted that politics had a critical impact both on U.S. military strategy and on media strategies. Braestrup assessed that the press and TV broadcasts did not turn U.S. citizens against the war as much as the strategies of President Johnson, who "substituted public relations for a decisive strategy" in Vietnam. And as losses grew, citizens as a whole grew demoralized, and public support for the war became divided.[78] Despite its capability to continue fighting, the will of the American people no longer supported the cause enough to allow continued U.S. participation. The military had lost its center of gravity!

Grenada (URGENT FURY)

Current U.S. military doctrine stresses quick and overpowering victories. To the media, it could mean that if reporters are not part of the operation from the outset, they will miss out on the coverage. In short, missing the battle could mean missing the whole war.[79] In 1983, the U.S. invaded the Caribbean island of Grenada, and a milestone was reached in the relationship between the U.S. military and the media. In a complete "shut out," the U.S. did not allow a single member of the U.S. media onto Grenada during the first two days of the operation despite the more than 600 reporters standing by on Barbados to cover the conflict. And on the third day of operations, only a single 15-person press poll was allowed in. Under severe criticism for it's handling of the media,

the SECDEF was forced to address the issue several ways. In December 1983, the *DOD Principles of Information* were released, stating in part that, "It is the policy of the Department of Defense to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, Congress, and members representing the press, radio, and television may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy."[80]

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen John Vessey, Jr., created a panel to examine the Grenada media operations, calling on the panel to answer the question: "How do we conduct military operations in a manner that safeguards the lives of our military and protects the security of the information while keeping the American public informed through the media?" [81] General Vessey's question captured the challenging dilemma perfectly. Retired Army MG Winant Sidle was called to lead the Military-Media Relations Panel and was joined by various media representatives, DOD PA personnel, and spokespersons from the Joint Staff and each of the services. After a week of meetings and discussions, the Sidle Panel presented eight recommendations and a Statement of Principle reiterating the idea that the American public must be informed of U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible by both the media and the government. One of the eight recommendations was the introduction of the DoD National Media Pool, which would be seriously challenged in the next decade.[82] The media pool concept might have been seen as a way to reduce the vulnerability of the military's center of gravity by simply reducing media access to military operations. Under media pool operations however, the center of gravity remained just as vulnerable because the public had no mechanism for truly seeing and understanding the military's goals, operations, and behaviors.

Panama (JUST CAUSE)

The Sidle Panel recommendations were tested six years after Grenada during U.S. operations in Panama in 1989. Due primarily to OPSEC concerns, SECDEF Richard (Dick) Cheney did not call out the DOD National Media Pool until the invasion of Panama had already begun. U.S. Southern Command did establish a Joint Information Bureau, but most reporters were dissatisfied with what they considered visits to "lukewarm battlefields" and PA handouts. In most cases, the media were unable to travel to active battlefields, observe operations, and file stories for the next day's news.[83] Once again, the military's treatment of the media came into question, and military PA operations regarding the media were reexamined. This time, the research was led by a reporter, Mr. Fred Hoffman, formerly of the Associated Press. Hoffman's research showed that the need for security had prohibited adequate PA planning with operational planning. In his final report, Mr. Hoffman developed 17 recommendations which shaped PA planning guidance, stressing the importance of the DOD National Media Pool and offering ways to improve its operation.[84] In hindsight, there was no reason to believe the media-military relationship that existed coming out of Panama would have such a landmark effect on the military's center of gravity when the military began its largest operation since Vietnam in the summer of 1990.

Iraq (DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM)

"The pentagon has won the last battle of the Vietnam War. It was fought in the sands of Saudi Arabia, and the defeated enemy was us [the U.S. media]."

Ron Nessen, Vice President for News at NBC.[85]

While only nine months removed from Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama, Operation DESERT SHIELD, beginning in August 1990, would usher in an unprecedented form of media coverage for military operations. Building on precedents established in Panama and on subsequent recommendations, media personnel covering DESERT SHIELD and DS were processed through and accredited by USCENTCOM's Joint Information Bureau. However, unlike previous U.S. conflicts, the host country played a major role in media operations. Initially, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia agreed to allow only a small number of reporters into Saudi Arabia. Those initial restrictions were impossible to enforce, and the Saudi Government eventually relented, but only with restrictions imposed and upheld by the military.[86] Once again the pool system became the primary means for reporters to cover the battlefield. At any given time, 20-25 small press teams were in the field with escorts while as many as 1,000 media members remained in the rear area.[87] Despite an apparent open and free flow of reporting, the media again took issue with military handling of the press. While the military system equated to "open censorship" by media representatives and their parent networks or papers, the media actually claimed that covert censorship was really practiced because the military controlled and limited the media's access to units and operations through its pool procedures. Once again, the media and the military embarked on an effort to produce better working relationships, resulting in the *Principles for News Media Coverage of DOD Operations.* Of the nine principles, two critical ones were agreed to which would dominate the media-military relationship from the early 1990s. First, press pool operations were to be the exception rather than the rule. Secondly, voluntary

compliance with security guidelines was a condition for media access to U.S. military forces.[88]

Gen Colin Powel described the military's sensitivity to the media's ability to shape public opinion when the Pentagon selected its spokesperson for Operation DESERT SHIELD/DS: "We picked Lieutenant General Tom Kelly as our Pentagon briefer not only because he was deeply knowledgeable, but because he came across like Norm in the sitcom Cheers, a regular guy whom people could relate to and trust."[89]

Despite DOD joint publications and service-specific instructions and regulations, in the end, military commanders usually determine both the access, and in large part, the coverage of their units or service. Such was the case during DS when the USMC created an atmosphere with the press that resulted in outstanding coverage about their operations in Kuwait, so much so that the Marines may have received a far greater share of attention and credit by the public for its role in DS compared to the other services. Without a doubt, Marine actions were critical to the liberation of Kuwait, but the size of its force, number of units, weapons expended, casualties, and area traversed were far less than the U.S. Army, many of whose units received minimal or no publicity. As a result, most analysts agree that the Army did not get its story out, denying the public an Army perspective of the war.[90] The USAF (and US Navy Aviation) may have also suffered from a similar fate because of the focus on cockpit video, replayed night after night on network TV showing munitions hitting targets. Some have assessed that this coverage, usually without reports or pictures of the aircrew involved, left the American public without a way to identify with its military force. James Kitfield, in the National Review, offered the following assessment: "If, as has been said, the first casualty of any war is

truth, the first casualty of a war in the information age may prove to be the trust that sustains the relationship between those who fight America's wars and those who report on wars."[91]

One example of a military situation that might have turned out differently if the media had received more access or details occurred during the U.S. air attack on the road from Kuwait to Basrah, dubbed the "Highway of Death." As reported by the media, the air attack looked like a slaughter of the retreating Iraqi Army and was probably a factor in the Pentagon's and President Bush's decision to end the ground war after only 100 hours (a decision which was criticized by many military personnel and has been debated ever since). Had reporters been closer to the source, it might have come out that only several hundred Iraqis were killed in the attacks on the Highway of Death, most having abandoned their vehicles in the attack. If the media had that story, a case could be made that the ground offensive would have continued, more Iraqi units would have been engaged and destroyed, and the Republican Guard units in southern Iraq might never have escaped up north to fight another day.[92]

The media may not have been satisfied with the way military events in the Persian Gulf were covered, but military personnel who served in DS typically remember nothing but overwhelming public support for operations against Iraq. Because the public understood the military goals and followed military actions through "24/7" news coverage, it was able to see the effects for themselves with the media as the messenger. The welcome home parades experienced throughout the U.S. were just part of the evidence of how strong the military's center of gravity had become.

Somalia (RESTORE HOPE)

If DS strengthened the military's center of gravity, then operations in Somalia had exactly the opposite effect. The media's presence in Somalia initially served the military's purpose, to alert the Somali warlords to the U.S. force presence. It was thought that media reports of U.S. special forces (SEAL teams) emerging on the beaches on December 9, 1992, would send a signal about U.S. power and intentions. However, that early cooperation did not last, and by the climax of U.S. military operations in Somalia in October 1993, the media was seen by many as exploiting military casualties with its pictures of downed U.S. helicopters and dead soldiers being dragged through the streets half-naked and being desecrated by Mogadishu mobs. Whether that footage was the catalyst towards an American retreat from Somalia or simply accelerated the departure already planned by the Clinton administration (which did not initiate the U.S. mission in Somalia), the media spin from the incident was immense. The October 3, 1993, battle in Mogadishu ended in less than 20 U.S. deaths, while Somali warlord faction deaths are estimated as high as 1,000. However, the lasting impressions with the American public were the literal images of dead U.S. soldiers and a captured Blackhawk pilot held captive by Somali forces.[93]

Many Americans did not even know that the U.S. military was engaged in combat operations in Somalia, believing instead that forces were present for humanitarian assistance and peace-keeping missions. Had the Clinton Administration, DOD personnel, or senior military leaders educated the American public on the changing mission in Somalia, President Clinton may not have felt the need to "cut and run" as a knee-jerk reaction to the battle of Mogadishu. While many Americans were shocked by the media

images of dead U.S. soldiers, polls indicate the American public would have easily supported increased military strikes as a legitimate reaction against Somali warlords.[94] It could be argued that in this case, U.S. leadership did not accurately assess the military's center of gravity and how strong it really was.

The news business is driven by profit, so whatever sells, gets attention. One of the things that sells best is imagery.[95] Think of the impact a single picture of a young Chinese man blocking a line of tanks near Tiananmen Square in 1989 or the images of starving children in Somalia in the early 1990s. It is ironic then that images may have been the driving force behind our intervention into Somalia, and they certainly played a role in President Clinton's decision to withdraw American forces out of Somalia.

Haiti (UPHOLD DEMOCRACY)

Three years after the first Persian Gulf War, the military-media relationship may have taken a large step forward in an operation that did not go as planned. As U.S. military units began planning for a forced entry into Haiti in September 1994, the U.S. Atlantic Command insisted that the DOD media pool have access to invasion plans and accompany assault units. Luckily, forced entry was not required, however, the planned media operation was successful in two ways. First, reporters were embedded into front-line units and saw first hand what the troops experienced as the operation evolved. Secondly, no OPSEC leaks were reported prior to the military action despite the plan being known to many media members.[96] The public may not remember Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY as a major event nor will it probably understand the importance of the change in media operations by the military. However, the insistence on embedded reporters may have set the stage for the next 10 years of combat media

coverage. Ultimately, that embedded style of coverage would pay huge dividends almost

10 years later, and, at least temporarily, strengthen American public support for

operations as the public got a close up look at the U.S. military in action.

Bosnia (JOINT ENDEAVOR)

All military operations are media events, even when the mission is peace-keeping.

When U.S. forces went into Bosnia in December 1995, the Army definitely had media

relations in mind during planning and initial deployment of U.S. forces. Several weeks

prior to the deployment, the Army embedded reporters with its units so that the press

would get an idea of how the military was preparing for the deployment and become

familiar with the unit before they went into Bosnia. In fact, the 1st Armored Division

Commander had a media plan whose first objective was to gain and maintain American

public support.[97] During the weeks leading up to the deployment and in the first several

weeks in Bosnia, the media stories were generally positive, achieving the Army's goal of

generating support from the American public in an effort to bolster troop morale. One of

the first controversies from the deployment was not a result of the media but played out

in the press. The Wall Street Journal reported that, among other things, Col Gregory

Fontenot, an armored brigade commander, expressed reservations that the American

military would be out of Bosnia within 12 months, in contrast to the official Clinton

administration policy. Subsequently, the New York Times ran an article quoting an

unnamed senior official in the Clinton administration who criticized Colonel Fontenot for

"extremely poor judgment".[98] There is no way to tell whether or not the media bickering

influenced public support, but it surely could not have helped build confidence in what

was already a controversial military deployment. The episode does demonstrate a critical

mistake that military leaders should avoid whenever possible. Senior military leaders and administration officials should never criticize subordinate commanders in the media. Not only does it show a lack of unity and purpose, but it hurts U.S. military credibility with the American public and provides the media with a story that distracts from the military mission underway.[99]

Serbia-Kosovo (ALLIED FORCE)

By 1999, the media had been involved in the Balkans longer than the U.S. military. When the showdown over Kosovo resulted in NATO air strikes, the media was prepared to cover the conflict. However, NATO chose to engage solely with an air campaign, and the media was unable to see for itself the effects airpower was having. Instead, the media was forced to rely on NATO and individual nations' press briefings. Almost immediately, the media was critical of the information it was receiving and the lack of detail the press briefings contained. When the air campaign did not deliver instant results and because of the reported disagreements among NATO nations, the media became even more skeptical that things were not going as well as NATO portrayed. One of the main issues that the media focused on was collateral damage. Minimizing collateral damage seemed to become as important as actually hitting targets and achieving the intended effects against Slobodan Milosevic's regime. And when evidence surfaced that air strikes had generated unintended collateral damage, some of the U.S. and NATO moral credibility was lost, as was some of the American public's support.[100] Media coverage of OAF was also hampered due to guidance from Gen Wes Clark, Commander of U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe. General Clark issued what amounted to a "gag" order, angering many reporters and

military personnel alike, and in effect, allowing Slobodan Milosevic to shape the international media coverage with his information operations (IO) plan.[101] To much of the world, the U.S. military surrendered a piece of the IO battlefield to the enemy, choosing not to give the media, and subsequently, the American public an inside view of the conflict. Fortunately, OAF combat operations ended in less than three months, but one has to wonder how U.S. and NATO leadership would have changed their media relations policies had the conflict gone on for an extended period. Without a better effort to explain and articulate the mission goals and progress to the American people, it is questionable how much support the mission would have enjoyed.

Afghanistan (ENDURING FREEDOM)

"In the end, war is not about statistics, deadlines, short attention spans or 24-hour news cycles. It's about will, the projection of will, the clear unambiguous determination of the President of the United States--and let there be no doubt about that--and the American people to see this through to certain victory."

SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld[102]

The DOD's handling of the media in OEF did not get off to a completely successful start. Approximately one month after operations began in Afghanistan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Victoria Clark sent a letter to media Pentagon bureau chiefs apologizing for shortcomings in U.S. military preparedness to support news organizations covering OEF.[103] Some of those shortcomings were described in an after-action review (AAR) from the 49th Public Affairs Detachment of the 82nd Airborne Division, one of the first PA units in Afghanistan. The 49[th's] primary

mission was to support the media with a secondary mission to provide command information products. Five main issues were identified in the AAR in which the 49th described an atmosphere of mistrust among the military towards the media. This is an important insight into the military-media relationship that continues to prevent the stories of U.S. forces in action from reaching the American public. In Afghanistan, it was obvious after only several months that the U.S. military was winning the fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but the American public was not getting the complete picture of what its military was doing in the nation's first response to the September 11th attacks on America.[104]

The lack of patience in the media was clearly evident only three weeks into the war effort in Afghanistan. Reporters and media personalities were questioning the U.S. war plan, using words like "quagmire" and "stalemate". On Oct 26th, ABC anchorman Peter Jennings led off an interview with Pakistani President Musharraf by asking if the United States was facing a quagmire.[105] President Bush voiced his displeasure with the media at a National Security Council meeting earlier on the same day, characterizing the media as defeatist: "The press will seek to find divisions among us. They will try and force on us a strategy that is not consistent with victory." It was obvious that President Bush perceived that some elements of the media did not want a victory in Afghanistan or at least acted as if they did not want one.[106] No media expectations have ever been published, but one must wonder exactly what the media expected from the U.S. military after only three weeks of war. It could be argued that some elements of the media expected the U.S. to fail. On October 31, 2001 (after less than a month of operations),

the NY Times ran an article that asked: "Could Afghanistan become another Vietnam? Is the U.S. facing another stalemate on the other side of the world?"[107]

SECDEF Rumsfeld placed the blame for the running news commentary on quagmires, defeats, and stalemates on what he called the "TV-talking heads". Addressing the media's lack of patience, Rumsfeld said of the media: "They've got the attention span of gnats," clearly echoing the thoughts of many military personnel who felt that the news business manufactured expectations and a sense of urgency. Rumsfeld, for one, believed the American public was more realistic and had more patience.[108] On November 1, 2001, at the daily Pentagon press conference, Rumsfeld voiced his thoughts on the media's attempt to find fault with 24 days of U.S. military activity in Afghanistan. Apparently not satisfied with Rumsfeld's comments, one member of the press responded, "Increasingly, it seems to be about selling the war, telling the American people why it's taking as long as it is and to have patience."[109] That reporter's comments bear some analysis. He was correct in that senior military leaders must "sell" the public on U.S. military operations in order to educate the public on U.S. objectives and the reasons behind the need for their fellow Americans to be put at risk. What the reporter obviously did not understand was the essence of war. Or did he think a month of combat qualified as "taking so long," as if the American public did not have the attention span or patience to support military options that went much longer? Maybe a more appropriate analysis would be to determine how the media could underestimate the American public so much. Maybe it was the fact that the U.S. had been attacked. Or perhaps it was the rapid victory against the Taliban regime with minimal casualties. Regardless, the public understood the military's goal, saw the results of the mission, and observed a professional military

operating in a manner consistent with public expectations. The military's center of gravity was secure, and it would remain so as the U.S. began preparing for operations in Iraq.

Iraq (IRAQI FREEDOM)

The most interesting concept of military-media relations affecting public support during OIF was the use of embedded reporters. In Iraq, hundreds of reporters lived and traveled side-by-side with U.S. military forces providing the American public with an unprecedented look at combat operations. Even more importantly, the American people gained unfiltered access to American soldiers on the battlefield, and in many cases, developed increased confidence in both the individual soldier and the military as a whole.[110] It is clear however, from the SECDEF's message in Feb 2003, on *Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in Central Commands Area of Responsibility,* that a historical WWII type of partnership was not evident between the military and the media just prior to OIF. The SECDEF's guidance seemed to focus more on countering negative media coverage rather than building a mutual trust: "We need to tell the factual story – good or bad – before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions, as they will most certainly continue to do."[111]

By the fall of 2002, plans for war in Iraq were developing, including the DOD's plan for information dominance. Victoria Clark, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, sold SECDEF Rumsfeld on the idea of embedded media and began meeting with the media in October 2002. From the DOD perspective, the goal was complete information dominance, and that included an aggressive campaign to build and

maintain support for the war fighters on the ground through unfiltered access to U.S. troops.[112] Once OIF began, the concept of embedded media was seen as a success by the military, the media, and most importantly, by the American public. The ROE and technology opened up the war to America, providing the public with better comprehension of what the military does, its sacrifices and hardships, and for many, a renewed pride in the U.S. military.[113] From the military perspective, embedded media operations successfully accomplished its main goal – gaining and maintaining American public support. The media too, could claim success with its "embeds" because of its unprecedented access to troops, strategies, and commanders. Live battlefield reports gave the media unfiltered story lines direct to the American public, and in many cases, the media developed credibility and cooperation with "their" units.[114] It could be argued that the demise of embedded operations signaled the end of positive press coverage from Iraq. By August 2003, only approximately 50 embedded reporters remained in Iraq once major combat operations ended. In addition to the embedded media, a large majority of the PA operation had also been shut down.[115] Is it any coincidence that American public support began to dwindle at approximately this same time? It could be argued that the U.S. lost the information superiority edge it had during major combat operations once it lost its ability to connect directly with the American public through its embedded operations.

Covering the war in Iraq since major combat operations were declared victorious in 2003 has become extremely complicated for many reporters. In a war with no defined frontlines, American forces are subject to enemy action from the time they leave their bases, as are the reporters embedded with them on patrol. For many reporters and parent

media companies, this risk is too high, and few reporters remain deployed with U.S. forces on a regular basis. Accordingly, some reporters remain in safe areas, like the "Green Zone" in Baghdad, capturing stories and images from their hotel balconies or by relying on second-hand sources for information. Usually, this equates to casualty news rather than balanced news coverage of military operations or military reconstruction efforts. As Fox News reporter Oliver North has pointed out, in Iraq today, the press does not report what it does not see.[116]

In Sep 2003, the U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership held a workshop attended by embedded reporters who covered the war and some of the actual ground combat unit commanders to discuss combat reporting. During the panel discussions, all were in agreement that the American public responded very favorably to the embedded reporting, and that embedding would probably form the basis for future combat coverage. When asked whether the presence of embedded reporters affected the behavior of the units they covered, the responses were split. The military indicated that the media saw true unit behavior in combat while the media members of the panel discussions thought their presence did affect the unit. Either way, both groups also agreed that the media presence had an overall positive affect on the press coverage units received because it led to a balance of good and bad news.[117] As the media coverage in Iraq has become overwhelmingly negative, American public support has waned to the point that much of the American will to continue military operations in Iraq is now gone. As described earlier, the longer the conflict continues, the more disengaged the American public may become, especially when the other factors of increased casualties, U.S. elections, and U.S. economic stability are considered.

While the embedded media process was a success, the same could not be said for the military's relationship with stateside media inside the DC beltway or with some of the broadcast news headquarters. One of the primary compliants was that the Pentagon would not confirm as much detail as the media wanted. In some cases, SECDEF Rumsfeld, through either policy or personality, seemed to dissolve some of the credibility that the American public developed through the embedded coverage as Rumsfeld was occasionally known to contradict field commanders. Rumsfeld was also short on some occasions with reporters, which it could be argued, led to a more critical perspective by those covering his press conferences.[118]

The major TV news networks provided continuous coverage of combat operations with live reports each day, in addition to the 24-hour cable news network coverage. In some cases, the TV broadcasts, managed by stateside editors and anchors, conflicted with stories coming out of the field. The most notable case occurred during the drive to Baghdad when extremely harsh sand storms combined with an unexpected rapid advance forced the U.S. military into an operational pause. To some back in the states, the pause generated "alarmist reporting in Washington that the plan was bad, the war was going badly, and it was a quagmire".[119]

One of the aspects of OIF media that did not always go smoothly involved guest TV analytical experts. Most networks brought in "armchair" analysts, usually retired general officers, to analyze the war. As in previous conflicts, not all the "armchair" analysts were actually experts. Some were not current on military capabilities and plans, and some seemed to have a political agenda rather than an analytical role. CNN's Lou Dobbs stopped using retired Army General Clark due to political overtones and several

other "experts" noted as criticizing the war plan rather than just explaining the "why" and "how" of the plan.[120] One Air Force general graded the media as a "7" but indicated that it would have been higher if not for the retired military consultants.[121] Ultimately, it could be argued that domestic politics was much more of a factor in critical reporting that originated in the U.S. than in those stories that came direct from the war zone. The war in Iraq was controversial even in its first month, and for many members of the media, critical reporting was a way to discredit Bush administration policies. This strategy could inadvertently target the military's center of gravity. Regardless of their political affiliation, Americans have the capacity to support military operations, but throw in the politics of the Democrat and Republican party squabbles, and the issue gets more complicated. The farther the issue gets from the facts of the military operation itself, the greater the potential for the American people to lose sight of the military goals and the missions. As a result, the military's center of gravity loses some of its strength.

Global War on Terrorism

It has been more than four years since the U.S. military became actively engaged in the GWoT. The U.S. military has been deployed to Afghanistan for an equal amount of time and has now been engaged in Iraq for three years. In that time, one aspect of media coverage that leaves room for improvement involves the stories of military personnel and their battlefield actions. In February 2006, SECDEF Rumsfeld testified before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) that there have been 371 Silver Stars and Service Crosses awarded to U.S. military personnel since Sept 11, 2001. [122] One Medal of Honor has been awarded, and most likely there will be more. Unfortunately, much of America needs a reminder of the brave Americans serving in the

military. While there has been an overabundance of media reporting during OEF and OIF, ranging from embedded reports to critiques to commentary and much more, there have been relatively few stories of individual actions. In a USCENTCOM staff member's perspective, "Soldiers, and the military in general, are treated as entertainment by the US media."[123] In previous conflicts, Hollywood might have made movies with John Wayne or other popular stars of the era while the conflict was being waged, but no so today. With the exception of a single dedicated TV show (FX's *Over There*), mainstream TV networks have chosen not to generate wartime entertainment dealing with U.S. forces in combat. That type of media could be equated to propaganda, just as it often was during WWII. If nothing else, the military would gain an additional outlet to show the American public how it conducts business; presenting its story, both good and bad, instead of leaving that story to the American public's imagination and to the mainstream media news. During his HASC testimony on Feb 8, 2006, Rumsfeld stated, "We could all do a better job, media and military alike, in telling their stories."[124]

During the same HASC testimony, Representative Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania, addressing the committee and witnesses that included SECDEF Rumsfeld, Marine Gen Peter Pace, CJCS, and Army Gen Peter Schoomaker, Army Chief of Staff, recounted the remarks of a soldier recently returned from Iraq. The soldier spoke about the story carried on the front page of the New York Times on January 7, 2006, dealing with a study on body armor and Marines killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which the Times showed vulnerable areas of the body: "You know, that illustration just gave information to the enemy about where and how they should hit my fellow colleagues back in Iraq and Afghanistan." Rep Weldon added one epitaph to that story, revealing that Army officials

had asked the Times not to run the illustration as part of the story because of the depiction of vulnerable areas, yet the Times ran it anyway.[125] That was not what SECDEF Rumsfeld had in mind in his quest for increased exposure and recognition for military personnel, however there is no way to stop that type of reporting in an open democracy such as ours, even if the story aids the enemy and potentially increases casualties.

From Vietnam to the current GWoT, the military and the media have learned a great deal about how best to deal with each other and the resulting impact on the American public. The media and the military have also seen that the public is both responsive to media influence on military operations and supportive of the ideals of duty, honor, country that are so important to the military. Despite recent improvements in the media-military relationship, there is no evidence that the media will back off its scrutiny of the military. Accordingly, the military will have to improve its tactics on its second front by securing its center of gravity--American public support.

Section III. Recommendations

So far, this paper has shed light on the military-media relationship, its affect on American public support for military operations, and the many factors that can complicate the struggle to maintain a strong center of gravity. American combat actions since the 1968 Tet invasion through the GWoT have provided examples of how public support, as it resembles the military's center of gravity, can be affected in a variety of ways. The following recommendations do not reflect a "book answer" on how to improve relations with the media or how to guarantee public support. Instead, these

recommendations focus on efforts to reduce the vulnerability of the military center of gravity to media assault. This author takes a two-fold approach involving the reduction of unacceptable behavior and a stronger information campaign to ensure the public receives an easily understood accounting of military events.

DOD and Service Guidance

One look at DOD, joint, and service publications, field manuals, and instructions indicates the DOD and the armed services all understand the importance of engaging the media on a regular basis and the importance of an open and honest information policy. Army Field Manual 46-1, Public Affairs Operations, sums up the military's requirement for public trust and support in its PA mission statement: "Public affairs fulfills the Army's obligation to keep the American people and the Army informed, and helps to establish the conditions that lead to confidence in America's army and its readiness to conduct operations in peacetime, conflict, and war."[126] Air Force Instruction 35-101, Public Affairs Policies and Procedures, says the purpose of PA is to enhance public trust and support.[127] Similar references can be found in all service guidance, in addition to countless directives on media relations, interviews, media training, freedom of information polices, and classification guidance. There is no doubt that the written instructions provide the right guidance, but it is up to military leadership at all levels, in concert with DOD and administration officials, to act on those guidelines. Joint Publication 3-61, Public Affairs, provides some of the best guidance for military personnel. The executive summary provides four easy-to-grasp concepts that should serve as the basis for PA operations that can generate both positive media coverage and public support from the American people.[128]

- Tell the truth.

- Provide timely information.

- Practice security at the source.

- Provide consistent information at all levels that tells the DOD story.

While PA guidance is an important tool of the trade for dealing with the media, service-specific core values are equally important when connecting with the American public. One reason the military, as an institution, is looked at so favorably in American society may be because of the core values U.S. service members espouse. A quick examination of the core values notes the traits required for successful military operations: loyalty, duty, respect, courage, excellence, and commitment, among others. The service core values do not all match, but each service includes the concept of honor or integrity. Those two concepts are critical in the military's battle with the media to maintain a strong center of gravity. Simply put, military behavior conducted under the concepts of honor and integrity are understood and respected in American society. That does not mean they will not be scrutinized by the media and the public, but actions that meet the test of honor and integrity are usually above reproach. Tactical actions such as the Abu Gharib and Mai Lai incidents receive much of the focus for not meeting service core values, however, senior DOD and military leaders would do well to set the example in their behavior and dealings with government and American society. Their behavior helps shape the tone for their services in addition to the example it sets for the American public. If that behavior meets and exceeds public expectations and service values, it goes a long way towards protecting the military's center of gravity. However, if that behavior

is inconsistent with service values and falls short of public expectations, the military's center of gravity becomes vulnerable.

The Truth

The military does not have the right to lie. It certainly has the right not to be forthcoming on all occasions (based primarily on OPSEC concerns), but the information it releases and reports must always be true. When the truth breaks down, so does the credibility of the U.S. military and the personnel involved in U.S. operations. For all the right reasons (discipline, integrity, morale, etc), the military must never give the American public any occasion to question its trust. Unfortunately, the military is not perfect. Because the military is accountable to the nation, both in the form of the elected government and to the people as a whole, the military should truthfully acknowledge negative events and get the story over with as soon as possible. Any perception of cover-up or a less than forthcoming report will give the nation cause to doubt and provide the media with incentive to investigate further, seeking the real "truth" of the story. But for the media, the "truth" is not always so simple. It can be a function of the reporter, their editor, how much space or time is allotted, any competing stories, and the fog of the news room. Unfortunately, any of these factors and many more could affect the how the story is reported.[129] Americans do not like being lied to, and they generally do not tolerate secrets that keep them on the sidelines of a war debate; i.e., public opinion at work. Obviously, the military cannot provide the public with all the details on every operation, and the public understands that.

There are times when military operations are so sensitive that it is inappropriate for senior military leaders, DOD personnel, or administration officials to make

substantive comments to the media, even when confronted with direct questions. However, that should be the exception rather than the rule. "No comment" is always an option, but it may not be the most useful response. For normal military operations, senior military leaders, DOD personnel, or administration officials should take the opportunity to ensure the American public understands the necessity of the action and how U.S. forces are accomplishing the mission. If no explanation is forthcoming, then the media will look elsewhere and will usually find "dissenters" willing to talk to the press, and depending on their status and comments, they could provide the media with a major news story. If the DOD or military fails to respond to realistic or reasonable critiques and abdicates its side of the story to the media, the public is left with a single point of view, and it could well cast military operations in a negative light and erode public support. Gaining and maintaining that public support in today's world of partisan politics and intense media scrutiny is such a key ingredient of combat success that it has been called a new principle of war.[130]

Strategic Communications

Without a public understanding of military goals and operations, the military's center of gravity is in jeopardy. One way to increase the public's understanding is through consistent articulation of DOD policy and military missions. To that end, it has been suggested that the U.S. needs a National Communication Strategy that provides better coordination of U.S. information efforts similar to the manner in which the National Security Strategy drives the National Defense Strategy and, in turn, the National Military Strategy. Known as "Strategic Communications," the effort could provide the mechanism to synchronize U.S. policy and military themes during steady-state and crisis

periods. While the Strategic Communication concept is not designed to replace mainstream media as the primary source for the American public, it would give the military a consistent strategy when it deals with the media. In this manner, the military can shape the message for the American public instead of leaving the media to interpret military stories for their own motives.[131] One recent example where the Strategic Communications concept might have provided a more positive effect was the perceived lack of strategy in Iraq. For most of 2004 and 2005, the Bush administration was attacked in the media for not having a plan for U.S. military and reconstruction operations in Iraq. When the Bush administration finally published its National Strategy for Victory in Iraq in November 2005, it was critiqued by many in the media as reactionary propaganda.[132] Some analysts argue that the "Bush Doctrine" since September 2001 is fairly consistent, yet it has not been well articulated or revitalized often enough the farther we get from the September 11th attacks. At a time when media memories and American patience are both in short supply, a type of "war weariness" could grow when the U.S. message is not consistently put forward. For Strategic Communications to be effective, the effort will take dedicated experts at all levels that can analyze media mediums and measure feedback of the administration, DOD, and military message. Without dedicated experts, the message is often generated in response to questions or events, whereas dedicated experts operating from a consistent, well-thought-out information strategy, can be proactive, capturing positive aspects of the military which will stay fresh in the public's mind.[133]

Getting the Message Out

All too often, U.S. forces serving in combat zones are surprised when they

return to the U.S. and compare what they saw first-hand in theater to what they observe in the U.S. media. Army Gen John Abazaid (USCENTCOM Commander) summarized what many troops have stated as he expressed his amazement in 2005 of how many people do not know or understand what the U.S. military is doing in Iraq. He goes a step further in assessing some responsibility to the media for the lack of American public awareness: "You will never see a headline in this country about a school opening or a power station being built and coming on line or a community doing well. Only negative things will get coverage in the media."[134] Obviously, such a statement is not entirely true, and the military itself bares its share of responsibility for not doing a better job of sharing its experiences with the American public. However, a case could certainly be made that in Iraq, the media has focused solely on things Americans do wrong instead of trying to present balanced coverage. In an effort to gain and maintain public support, General Abazaid suggested that military personnel speak at their local Lion's Clubs, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) meetings, or schools when they are home to better educate America about what is going on in Iraq.[135]

In short, General Abazaid is calling for a "push" information campaign rather than relying on a "pull" system. With a "push" campaign, the DOD and the military make it easy for the American public to digest information on military operations. DOD and service guidance is filled with the mechanics of such a campaign. However, the key to the system is not the media, but a consistent, honest, easy-to-understand message. That message should be clear at all levels of military command and throughout DOD, continuously "pushed" in a variety of mediums to the public so that they do not have to search for it. If the public has to search, investigate, or "pull" to find out what is going on

militarily, it has plenty of choices and is guaranteed to find uneducated and biased perspectives. Whereas the military should focus on "pushing" the military's story to the public, the administration and DOD messages are equally important, especially during combat operations. Currently, most of the military sees itself engaged in combat, yet it does not see the overall American public on a wartime footing. Getting the nation on a wartime footing is the President's job, but senior DOD and military leaders can support that task through Strategic Communications, better media management, and better training and opportunities for military personnel.

Increased Training Opportunities

The majority of Americans form their opinions on the military based on what they read, see, and hear in the media. Accordingly, the best thing the military can do is change its inherent attitude that the media "is bad and should be avoided." Regardless of the media's values, morals, or intentions, not dealing with the media is simply not an option for the military, especially for senior personnel. All future leaders need more media training. No matter what their career field, leaders could always benefit from PA training that will help them build and manage relationships with the press. Those relationships offer better potential for balanced and positive reporting and draw public support. Media training is not limited to individual training requirements. The military must ensure all joint and coalition training venues such as the National Training Center at Ft Irwin, CA, the Joint Readiness Training Center at Ft Polk, LA, or Red Flag at Nellis AFB, NV, include media training and media exercise-type events that prepare all services to deliver their message to the American public.

Most post-conflict AARs recommend an increase to the number of trained PA forces for each service. One response to the lack of trained and experienced PA personnel is JFCOM's Joint Public Affairs Operations Group (JPAOG). Coming out of Exercise Millennium Challenge 2002, the JPOAG was designed to serve as a standing, rapidly deployable PA organization able to deploy with Joint Task Forces or other similar command-level organizations to provide immediate PA assistance with media and command information products. The unit would deploy with a complete communication system and be prepared to both augment and act as the Joint Information Bureau.[136]

Obviously, the recommendations made here do not reflect a complete list of issues that must be solved to reduce the vulnerability of the military's center of gravity. What this paper did offer was a two-fold approach that could increase the likelihood that military behavior will meet public expectations and could better articulate DOD and military goals and operations to the American public. As stated earlier, if the public understands the military's mission, how the military has accomplished that mission, and the behavior of its forces, public support should be strong enough to withstand the media's assault.

Summary

The most critical issue of this thesis is American public support for military operations. History has proven that both the military and the media have the ability and the goal to shape public opinion. This thesis identified and analyzed some of the factors that make public support vulnerable to the media's influence. Issues such as politics, technology, and new cultural "norms" all play critical roles in the military's attempt to

gain and maintain public support. Next, this thesis assessed the impact U.S. conflicts had on public support from the Vietnam War through today's GWoT struggle. The Vietnam War and combat in Southwest Asia highlighted the "see-saw" military-media relationship that affected public support. Finally, several recommendations were explored as a means to reduce the vulnerability of the center of gravity by focusing on behavior expectations and better articulation of military goals and operations.

Conclusion

Whereas the junior officers of Vietnam were the senior officers of the 1980s and 1990s, the junior officers in Iraq and Afghanistan today will lead the military in 10 to 20 years. Each group of leaders faced similar challenges, but the world has changed significantly since the Vietnam War. Accordingly, the conditions that shape today's security environment must be understood in order to gain and maintain public support for military operations. Those conditions include a highly political society, a media that will attack administration polices by criticizing military operations, U.S. engagement in a "long" war against radical extremists, and the U.S. as the world's sole super power. Under those circumstances, there can be no doubt that the military's strategic center of gravity is American public support, and, when under attack, the military has no choice but to fight a two-front war to maintain that support. By ensuring the military operates in a manner consistent with American public expectations and by ensuring the public understands the military's goals and missions, the vulnerability of the center of gravity can be reduced. Aside from the security of U.S. forces, no greater challenge exists, and it is a course of action not to be taken lightly—American public support lies in the balance.

ENDNOTES

[1] Lloyd L. Matthews, <u>Newsmen & National Defense: Is Conflict Inevitable</u>? (Introduction by Peter Braestrup) McLean VA: Brassey's Inc., 1991.

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Available from http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=28412. Accessed Dec 22, 2005. Some journalists point to three concepts in explaining their war coverage. First, journalists work in concert with, but independent of, government and military officials. Even embedded reporters do not have their stories censored (however they could lose their embedded credentials if they reveal information previously set as off limits). Secondly, reporters serve as watchdogs for American society. As one naval officer explained, "Generally, you'll find that the younger troops are more easily upset by some news reports. Leadership takes it in stride. They know it is a part of the game." And journalists see the game as one of checks and balances where the media has a huge impact on and a responsibility to the American public. Lastly, it can be argued that journalists serve democracy by contributing to a free and responsible media by educating the public on military operations.

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[23] In 1999, multiple U.S. Army personnel used the term "blood lady" to describe a certain CNN field correspondent who invariably was present to report the news only after casualties had occurred or were imminent. The author was present during conversations at Ft Leavenworth, KS.

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[27] Aukofer, 30. The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt conducted mail surveys on the relationship between the U.S. military and the news media in pre-invasion and combat situations. Surveys were sent to more than 2,000 military officers, of which 50% were generals or admirals, and to 351 "carefully selected news media members". Vanderbilt received 42% or 146 media responses while 935 officers returned responses for a rate of 47%. Five of the more interesting statements and results are listed below.
- The news media is more interested in negative stories of wrongdoing/scandals than positive stories of victories/efficient operation.
  Percentage of agreement: Military: 82%   Media: 47%
- The news media is more interested in increasing readership/viewership than in telling public what it needs to know.
  Percentage of agreement: Military: 91%   Media: 30%
- Few members of the media are knowledgeable about national defense.
  Percentage of agreement: Military: 70%   Media: 74%
- News media should be free to visit any place they choose within the war zone.
  Percentage of agreement: Military: 10%   Media: 73%
- News media should be free to visit only those places approved by the military.
  Percentage of agreement: Military: 55%   Media: 23%

The complete survey offers a much more detailed analysis on the relationship between the media and the military.

[28] Ibid., 31-32.

[29] Kennedy, 23.

[30] Felman, 7.

[31] Ibid., 19.

[32] Charles Kaiser. 1968 in America. (New York, NY: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988.) 61.

[33] Kennedy, 87-88.

[34] Michael E. Brown, (Editor). Grave New World: Security Challenges in the 21st Century. Chapter 11, Transnational Mass Media Organizations and Security, Dana Owen, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003.) 247.

[35] Robert A. Pape. "True Worth of Airpower", (Foreign Affairs (New York, NY), Mar/Apr 2004), 121.

[36] Demello, 23F.

[37] David Hackworth (Col (Ret), USA). "CNN, Time and Journalism 101". WorldNet Daily. Jun 24, 1998. Available from http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp? ARTICLE_ID=18389. Accessed Dec 22, 2005.

[38] Kennedy, 87.

[39] Alicia Shepard Narrowing the Gap – Military, Media, and the Iraq War. (Chicago, IL: McCormick Tribune Foundation, 2004.) 65.

[40] Kevin Lovejoy (Lt Col, USA). "Improving Media Relations". (Military Review (Ft Leavenworth, KS), January-February 2002.) 53.

[41] Thomas Sowell. "4th Estate Becomes the 5th Column". (Las Vegas Review Journal, Las Vegas, NV. Jan 26, 2005.) B9.

[42] "Goodnight, Ted: Nightline Anchor is Stepping Down after a Quarter Century on the ABC Show". (Daily Press, Newport News, VA, Nov 21, 2005.) D1.

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[46] Margaret H. Belknap "The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?" (US Army War College Research Project, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2001.) 1.

[47] Brown, 243 (Owen). Comments by Marvin Kalb, former media correspondent and current media analyst.

[48] Felman, 8.

[49] Laird.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Brown, 237-238 (Owen).

[52] Ibid., 252.

[53] Kathleen Parker "The Danger's of Today's News". (Daily Press, Newport News, VA. Nov 1, 2005.) A9.

[54] Kennedy, 152.

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[56] Mark Mazzetti "Dispatches from Media Boot Camp: The Last Mile". Nov 22, 2002. Available from http:// http://www.slate.com/?id=2073993&entry=0. Accessed Jan 3, 2006. Mark Mazzetti previously served as the defense correspondent for U.S. News and World Report.

[57] Robin Sloan. "Chris Hedges on War and the Press". Poynteronline. Mar 19, 2003. Available from http://poynteronline.org/content/content_view.asp?id=25166. Accessed Dec 22, 2005. Chris Hedges, war correspondent including NY Times where he shared in a 2001 Pulitzer for coverage of Global Terrorism.

[58] Kennedy, 11.

[59] Lovejoy, 52.

[60] Jason D. Holm. "Get Over It! Repairing the Military's Adversarial Relationship with the Press". (Military Review (Ft Leavenworth, KS), Jan-Feb 2002.) 59.

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[68] Todd Gitlin. The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage. (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1987.) 299.

[69] Lafeber, 28. American deaths in Vietnam: Prior to 1966-2,264; 1966-6,143; 1967-11,153; 1968-16,592; 1969-11,616; 1970-6,081; 1971-2,357; 1972-641; 1973-168. (Source: National Archives)

[70] Ibid. These ratings are also interesting considering the advent of TV war coverage. For the first time in American history, TV news became the primary means for Americans to get their news on military operations in Vietnam. Newspapers still held the appeal for certain Americans, especially the more literate, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan audiences that followed politics and expected different perspectives with more depth. On the contrary, the public sector that favored TV for its news was, by in large, less educated, less informed, and less interested in differing perspectives. They were also less questioning and more outwardly patriotic. As the American public formulated its opinion on the war in Vietnam, it seemed to do so from sources that only reinforced their beliefs in the U.S. military mission. Source: Lefeber.

[71] Peter Braestrup. Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977.) 3. A credibility gap between the media and the military had existed as early as 1963 in Vietnam. Even though the U.S. military was not involved in major combat, but in advising the South Vietnamese, there were still some concerns that information on U.S. casualties was being withheld. Between 1963 and 1967, the U.S. military became entrenched in Vietnam and the war effort became a major news story with more than 200 reporters in Saigon. For the most part, media coverage of the war had ranged from indifferent to positive, despite complaints that the official versions of the stories released by military officials in Saigon were often in direct conflict to what reporters had seen first hand in the field regarding friendly casualties, enemy body counts, and civilian collateral damage. (Source: Braestrup, 9)

[72] Cronkite, 254-255.

[73] Ibid., 256-257. Up until that point, Cronkite felt that his news coverage had been impartial, yet he'd already been accused of bias by both sides. From the conservatives, he was labeled unpatriotic, and from the liberals, he was called a mouthpiece for the administration.

[74] Kaiser, 77.

[75] Cronkite, 257-258.

[76] Richard Nixon. In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal. (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1990.) 216.

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[80] Barry E.Venable. "The Army and the Media". (Military Review (Ft Leavenworth, KS), January-February 2002.) 67.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Felman, 15.

[83] Ronald H. Cole. "Operation JUST CAUSE, The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990". (Joint History Office, Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995.) 48.

[84] Venable, 68.

[85] Kennedy, xi.

[86] Felman, 23.

[87] Venable, 69.

[88] Ibid., 68. The nine principles were not decided on without some controversy. Originally, the media proposed 10 principles; including "News material—words and pictures—will not be subject to security review." In response to the media's desire to eliminate censorship once and for all, the Pentagon proposed an alternative principle that said: "Military operational security may require reviews of new material for conformance to reporting ground rules." This version of the statement was not agreed to, and ultimately the fundamental disagreement towards censorship resulted in only nine principles.

[89] Powell, 529.

[90] Holm, 60.

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[93] Porch, 11.

[94] Frank J. Stech. "Winning CNN Wars", (Parameters (Carlisle, PA), Autumn 1994.) 4.

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[96] Venable, 70.

[97] Lovejoy, 55.

[98] Belknap, 10.

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[100] Ibid.

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[102] Bob Woodward. Bush at War. (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002.) 286.

[103] Snyder, 16.

[104] Ibid., 17.

[105] Woodward, 263.

[106] Ibid., 262.

[107] Ibid., 278.

[108] Ibid., 283.

[109] Ibid., 286.

[110] Shepard, 12.

[111] Secretary of Defense Message, Subject: Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations and Deployments in Central Commands Area of Responsibility. (Washington, DC, Feb 2003.) 1.

[112] Shepard, 12. In the build-up to war following the attacks on September 11, 2001, embedded reporters were not really an option due to the nature of the conflict (special forces, CIA, air strikes, and use of the Northern Alliance). However, by the Spring of 2002, there were more than 700 reporters covering OEF in and around Afghanistan. In general, the stories broadcasted in the U.S. were positive ones, and the public perceived operations in Afghanistan as a success. Source: Brown, 247 (Owen). Unlike some military operations since Vietnam, PA became a central theme in planning right from the outset. ROE were established and more than 230 reporters attended a "media boot camp" and participated in training at such places as the JRTC. There were still concerns on both sides. Despite the ground rules that forbid reports on ongoing operations, many military personnel were still concerned with OPSEC. From the media's side, many reporters were concerned that they would be perceived as "cheerleaders" for U.S. military operations and U.S. administration policy instead of independent observers.

[113] Ibid., 58.

[114] Ibid., 60.

[115] Ibid., 72.

[116] Oliver North. Clash of the Titans Debate. Regents University, October 21, 2005.

[117] Michael Pasquarett. "Reporters on the Ground: The Military and the Media's Joint Experience During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM", (Issue Paper, Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, October 2003, Vol 08-03.) 3. Although not officially tasked to provide recommendations to the DOD for future media coverage, the War College workshop developed several proposals that members believed would enhance the media-military relationship and provide even better reporting for the American public, many of which were based on enhancing trust between reporters and the units they cover. Critiques over embedded media coverage include the lack of freedom of movement, a perception of more "show" than substance, and the lack of "big-picture" coverage. Most reporters also acknowledge that there is room for additional battlefield coverage, primarily through media operations unattached from the military or government. Known as unilateral reporters, their most obvious advantage is the freedom from any semblance of U.S. censorship, reliance, or control.

[118] Shepard, 53.

[119] Ibid., 42.

[120] Ibid., 55.

[121] Ibid., 57.

[122] Donald Rumsfeld. U.S. Secretary of Defense. House Armed Services Committee Hearing on Defense Authorization, (109th United States Congress, Washington, DC, Feb 8, 2006.) 25.

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[124] Donald Rumsfeld. U.S. Secretary of Defense. House Armed Services Committee Hearing on Defense Authorization, (109th United States Congress, Washington, DC, Feb 8, 2006.).

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About the Author

Lt Col Allen Kimball joined the Air Force in 1987. He is a career intelligence officer with assignments at fighter squadron, fighter wing, air operations center, and major command staff levels. He was also an instructor at the Air Force Weapons School. Prior to attending the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Lt Col Kimball commanded the 19th Weapons Squadron at Nellis AFB, NV. His previous Professional Military Education includes Air Force Squadron Officer School, Army Command and General Staff College, and Air War College (Corr.). Lt Col Kimball and his wife, Lisa, have been married since 1987 and have three children.